

THE OHIO ADENA AND THEIR TUBULAR PIPES

by
D.R. Gehlbach
Columbus, Ohio

One of the most perplexing matters in trying to identify prehistoric artifacts is the lack of available information about the circumstances of their discovery. This situation has been exacerbated in Ohio where many of the state's mounds were examined and artifacts extracted before careful record keeping was introduced. Incomplete records (field notes) prepared by researchers sometimes failed to indicate the associations of important artifacts in excavated mounds. Some of the hand written records of excavations were much abbreviated and hard to decipher, therefore of limited help.

The writer in his long-term study of Ohio's prehistoric pipes has been disappointed by inadequate reference materials about the occurrence and proposed applications for the tubular pipes of the Adena Indians. As a result there remains the largely unanswered question about whether some of the impressive looking tubes were actually smoking devices or instead used in a different manner. And if used as smoking instruments why don't most show the residues from charred tobacco and/or other smoking materials? Were the pipes instead employed largely as talismans, devotional items, symbolic funerary gifts or perhaps even primitive medical instruments (aspirating tools for diseases and other maladies)?

Don Dragoo, perhaps the single most influential compiler of the Early Woodland Period Adena materials, also wrestled with the issue of possible uses for the unique blocked end pipes, particularly when they were found as burial accompaniments. In his important treatise on the Adena, titled *Mounds For The Dead*, Dragoo stated, "The reasons for and the significance of placing (Adena) pipes with burials present an interesting problem. Usually a single pipe was placed with an (Adena) burial where it would seem that the pipe was the property of the deceased. In one mound, (Beech Bottom in West Virginia), however, there were more than 32 pipes that apparently were all presented as an offering to one individual. Why? Was this man a pipe maker? Was this a way of paying tribute to a revered individual in which the men of the clan gave up their prized pipes? Was the pipe of special significance in their ceremonies? If so, why were pipes placed with some persons and not with others? Did only certain individuals have the rights to a pipe? These and many other questions goad the archaeologist, but unfortunately, all too often the available information is insufficient to warrant positive answers. Adding to the mystery is the fact that although most Adena pipes are burial accompaniments in mounds others were apparently included in the fill dirt used

to build the tumulus. They are not associated with other objects or features found in the mounds.

The lower Midwest (Figure 1) served as the backdrop for the populations of Adena Indians, geographically providing a series of readily available connected waterways for travel. Their mounds were primarily located near major rivers such as the Ohio, Kanawha, Scioto, Miami, Whitewater and Licking and along a series of regional feeder creeks. From about 600BC to 100AD the humped mounds, some of considerable proportions, served as the cemeteries for a limited number of individuals. There is an information void about the Adena involving the location of their habitations. Where they lived and the proximity of their homes to their mounds are largely unresolved matters.

It is believed Adena tubular pipes likely evolved from earlier Archaic Period tubular pipes. Beginning in the middle to late Archaic Period, from about 2000BC to 800BC, existing populations of Archaic Indians began crafting circular tubular pipes out of various hardstone materials. Archaic tubular pipes were sculpted and bored beginning at the larger bowl end. Their bulbous cigar-shaped pipes provided adequate protection for mostly sizable smoking cavities that gradually decreased in diameter to the stem end. The Adena people adopted the basic tubular configuration and added a new blocked end feature at the stem end. This consisted of a pencil-thin cavity bored in from the stem end joining a much larger cavity excavated from the opposite end. Later they added unique flared and constricted motifs at the stem end and even an angled stem aperture off the tube.

Mostly straight tubular pipes with the blocked end feature, the primary subject of this article, were used throughout the Adena era, from about 600BC to 100AD. The evolution of the several Adena tubular pipe forms is a somewhat confusing issue when identifying the time periods when they were used. It appears the Adena tubular pipe style modifications, mostly at the stem end, were adopted based on regional preferences. The flared mouthpiece forms were found mostly in central and southern Ohio while slightly tapered examples, copying the earlier Archaic forms, were more common at some Indiana mound sites. Preferred raw materials also varied regionally with Ohio pipestone most often used at Adena sites in eastern, central and southern Ohio, western Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia. The Kentucky-based Adena people used limestone for their more diminutive tubular pipes while

Indiana examples were usually made of sandstone or various hardstone materials.

Pictured in Figures 2, 3 and 4 are three tubular pipes from Ohio although their reported recovery locations are widely separated. Figure 2 – 4" in length is modeled out of gray/brown Ohio pipestone. Its dimensions are mostly uniform throughout excepting the typical offset drilled smoking cavity. This specimen conforms in proportions to many examples, also its crafting material and dimensions. The opening at the stem end is only about 1/16 of an inch in diameter. It was found in Scioto County, Ohio. Figures 3 and 4 show two much more sizable examples with slightly different configurations. Both are products of Ohio pipestone probably obtained from a heavily sourced hilltop quarry in Scioto County. On the left is the largest specimen, almost 7" in length. As can be seen in Figure 3 the orange and brown specimen has been exposed to a fire. The original gray pipestone material has been altered producing its current coloration. In several spots the excessive heat has cracked the surface material. The pipe's surface also shows black smudging and in places a calcium deposit. Calcification continues inside the drilled cavity. The pipe's largest diameter is at the stem end with a gradual taper to the bowl end. Its largest diameter is about 1-1/2 inches. It has a slight lip at the stem end. Found in Meigs County, Ohio it ranks as one of the larger pipes of its type from the state. Of note the subject pipe closely resembles in form other Adena tubular pipes found in western Pennsylvania and at some non-mound sites on the east coast. The pipe on the right is another large example almost 6" long. It has mostly uniform dimensions over its length. This tube was modeled from gray/brown Ohio pipestone. Notable features include a slight lip at the stem end and probable red ocher deposits inside the pipe's smoking chamber. The latter evidence may provide a clue on its one-time use as a symbolic "blood letting" device during rituals. Slight discoloration of the raw material near the stem end suggests it was also used as some type of smoking device in conjunction with the rituals. It was represented as coming from Mercer County, Ohio. Figure 4 is a profile view of the same two pipes.

The unique tubular pipes of the Adena Indians represent a distinctive development of alleged smoking materials during the first mound building period in North America. Any definitive understanding of their specific use or uses as special purpose instruments will be based further research and resulting interpretive studies. Suffice it to say due to their rarity and intrinsic value the subject

pipes had restricted or ceremonial applications. Most would have been prized for their craftsmanship and visual attributes and probably were possessed by only important individuals. Their apparent value can be further validated by examples that were

preserved and reworked into smaller forms after being damaged. Pipes were likely both functional and/or symbolic religious utensils and used mainly during rituals. They also may have served as curative devices used to help expunge medical problems.

Reference

Dragoo, Don W.

1963 *Mounds For The Dead: An Analysis Of The Adena Culture*, Annals Of Carnegie Museum, Vol. 37, Pittsburgh Pa.

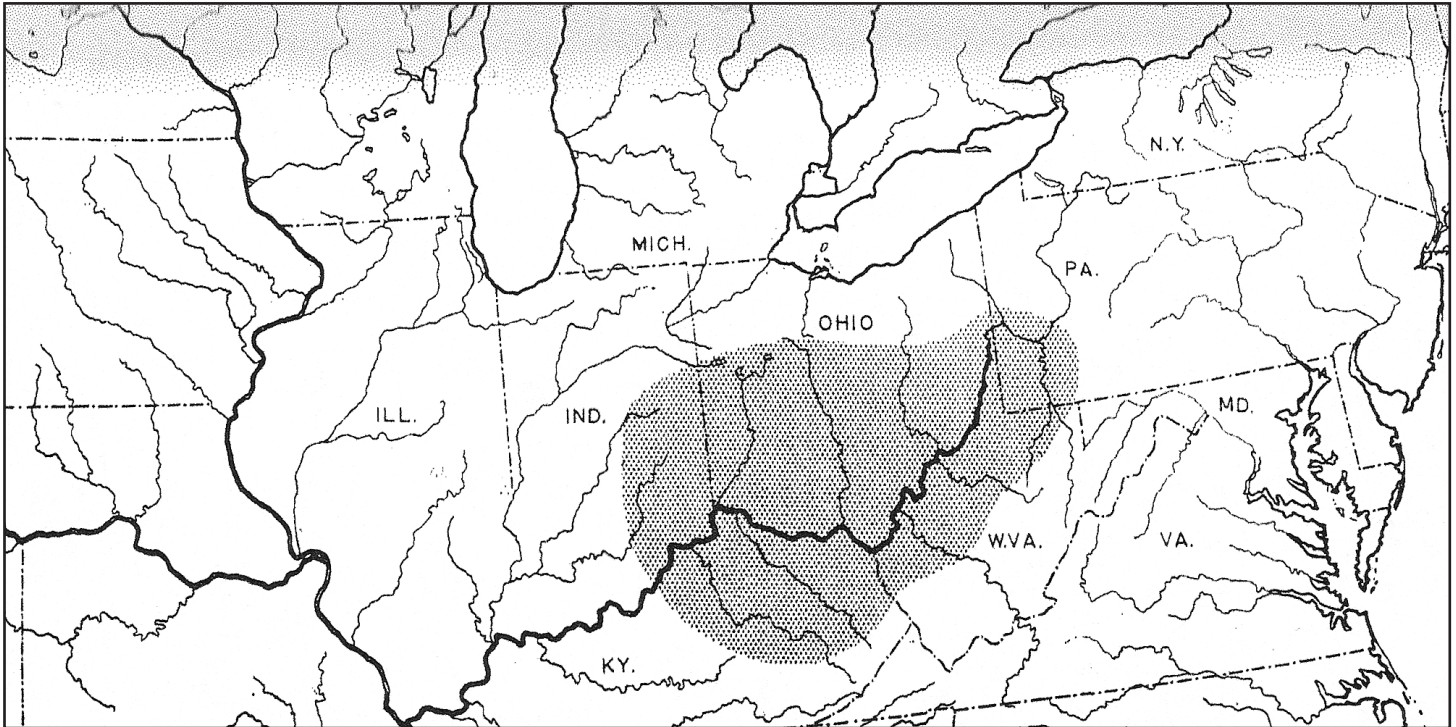


Figure 1 (Dragoo) Distribution of Adena sites.



Figure 2 (Gehlbach) Typical blocked end Adena tubular pipe, pipestone, Scioto County, Ohio.



Figures 3 & 4 (Gehlbach) Two views of large blocked end tubular pipes, pipestone, Meigs County, Ohio and Mercer County, Ohio.